



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
In Support of Sec. 17 of SB 1224, An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services**

**Anna Doroghazi, Director of Public Policy and Communication
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, April 1, 2010**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Anna Doroghazi, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of Connecticut's nine community-based rape services programs. We would like to offer our support for the changes to victim compensation outlined in Section 17 of SB 1224, *An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services*.

SB 1224 makes changes to C.G.S. § 54-211(a)(1)(c) that would make it easier for victims of sexual assault to receive victim compensation. These changes take into consideration the unique challenges associated with reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement, and they give the Office of Victim Services more authority to order compensation payments for credible claims.

Sexual assault is different than many other crimes because the demonstrable physical act associated with it – sexual contact or penetration – is not illegal in most circumstances. Although there is a clear distinction between consensual and nonconsensual sexual contact, it can sometimes be difficult for law enforcement to prove that a crime has occurred, and many credible claims of sexual assault are ultimately unsubstantiated. Sexual assault is also unlike other crimes in that victims may feel embarrassed about making a police report. They may refrain from reporting because they worry about being blamed or getting in trouble for their victimization, or they may fear that their claim will not be taken seriously in the criminal justice system.

Regardless of whether or not a sexual assault victim makes a police report or has their claim validated within the criminal justice system, the physical and emotional aftereffects of victimization can last for years and require intensive medical and psychological intervention. The expenses associated with sexual victimization can be considerable, and victim compensation is critical for survivors who might not otherwise have the financial resources needed to receive assistance.

Although crime victims typically must file a police report in order to be eligible for victim compensation, existing Connecticut law [C.G.S. § 54-211(a)(1)(c)] makes an exception for sexual assault victims, who can be considered eligible for compensation if they have a forensic evidence collection kit completed within 72 hours of their assault.

This provision has greatly benefited sexual assault survivors who, as mentioned before, may be reticent to file a police report.

There can be problems, however, for victims who have forensic evidence collected and later choose to report their assault to law enforcement. These victims are considered eligible for compensation upon submitting to evidence collection, but if they subsequently file a police report, and their claim is found to be unsubstantiated (as many credible claims are), they become *ineligible* for compensation. The risk of becoming ineligible for compensation may discourage some victims from making a police report and attempting to hold their offenders accountable for their actions.

SB 1224 would make it possible for the Office of Victim Services to order compensation for sexual assault victims who have disclosed their victimization to specified healthcare providers, mental health professionals, police officers, sexual assault counselors, social workers, and other relevant professionals. This amendment to Sec. 54-209 would benefit sexual assault survivors in two key ways: 1) it would make it possible for survivors to become eligible for compensation if they seek assistance from a range of service providers, and 2) it would give the Office of Victim Services increased authority to order compensation for sexual assault victims if the Office or a compensation commissioner can reasonably conclude that an assault has occurred.

Access to compensation is critical for victims of sexual violence who have incurred expenses as a result of their assault. SB 1224 acknowledges the unique obstacles that sexual assault survivors face in reporting their victimization, and it gives the Office of Victim Services more discretion in determining eligibility for compensation. CONNSACS supports the changes that this bill would make to C.G.S. § 54-211(a)(1)(c), and we encourage the Committee to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration.